

FREE REMARKS
ON
PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY:
IN WHICH THAT
DIVINE INSTITUTION
is briefly contrasted with the
MODERN PROFESSION OF IT,
BOTH IN
The Established Church,
AND AMONG
DISSENTERS IN GENERAL.

THE PROPHETS PROPHECY FALSELY, AND THE
PRIESTS BEAR RULE BY THEIR MEANS, AND THE
PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO: AND WHAT WILL
YE DO IN THE END THEREOF?—JEREMIAH V. 31.

*Whatever moderation or charity we may owe to men's persons,
we owe none at all to their errors, and to that frame which is built
on and supported by them.*

BISHOP BURNET.

—◆—
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PREFACE.

THE freedom of enquiry indulged throughout the following pages, will perhaps be very offensive to two sorts of people, who, together, make up the greater part of mankind; to those who love *to be lead* in their Religion by men of respectable names; and to those who imagine there is no Religion worth contending for. If the latter sort can be persuaded to *think*, and the former to think *for themselves*, the offence will be in some measure removed.

If some apology is necessary to the *candid* and *charitable* among *Christians* for the censorious spirit which appears; the writer is at a loss for a sufficient one. He certainly is not conscious of being moved by ill-will toward the Clergy of any denomination, much less by a contempt of true Religion, which is quite a different thing. Yet he dares not be confident in the goodness of his own disposition: he does not think himself infallible, nor that any man on earth is so: but he dares to be positive in asserting that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of judgment concerning *the faith of Christ*, and the only sure guide in the duties of *Morality and Religion*. All mankind is liable to mistake; so many are the

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corrupt passions of the human heart, so many sources are there of delusion, that it becomes every man to be cautious, humble, and self-diffident.— But must he on these accounts be diffident of God, or mistrustful of the sacred records of Heaven? Every just reason of humility and self-diffidence is a sufficient reason for a thankful and firm adherence to the Revelation of God,

It may be proper to assure the reader, that the earnest expressions, which he will find on the subject of the alliance between the Christian Religion and the State, do not arise from any manner of desire to see any other form of national Religion take place of the present. The writer is ever ready to join with the Clergy in praising the excellent constitution of Church and State, if it is not called *Christianity*, but is allowed its proper character as a *worldly system*. In *this view*, it is an *excellent scheme*: He does not think if there *must* be a national form of Religion, that the present can be much mended. Nor has he the least inclination to take part in the labours of any society for reformation of manners; except it were in a society, the members of which should agree to give mutual assistance in reforming themselves.

Every corruption of the Religion of Jesus is certainly abominable before God; but vengeance belongs only to him; and the disposal of nations is in his hands. All that any advocate for primitive Christianity

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Christianity may do, is, to bear testimony to it on any suitable occasion, and to exemplify it as far as he can in his practice.

The Sectaries of former ages, have been very justly condemned, not, for speaking as they thought, but, for attempting in fact to impose their notions upon other men, *by Power*. And almost every sect in its turn has been ambitious of reigning. It is the peculiarity of the Christian Religion that its Disciples cannot *hope*, for worldly power, or national establishment. It is enough if they are suffered by any government to have liberty of conscience, and they ought not to mean any greater affront than Jesus himself intended to give the world, when they confidently unite with him in declaring that *its works are evil*. He taught his Disciples to render unto *Cesar* the things that are *Cesar's*. But he never gave leave to the Clergy to render to *Cesar* the things that are God's.

The utmost respect is due to *civil* government from every member of society. The laws of God require it. Under the present mild administration every Christian has peculiar inducements to be *gratefully* subject to it; because it secures his liberty of conscience. It is hoped that nothing in the ensuing pages can be justly interpreted as an abuse of that liberty, or a disrespect of the *Powers ordained of God*.



FREE REMARKS,

Ec. Ec. Ec.

THE prevalence of infidelity has long been a general topic of complaint amongst the professors of Christianity, both Dissenters and Churchmen, and various reasons have been assigned to account for the undisputed fact. The inconsistent conduct of those who profess themselves the friends of Christianity, with their avowed principles, may undoubtedly be placed in the foremost class of causes. For it is not to be wondered at, that FREETHINKERS in general, should abide by their objections to Christianity, when, with so much profession of it, it is not to be seen exemplified, either in the Established Church, or among the many congregations that have long dissented from that church. Not that those men would like Christianity were they to see it in its simplicity, any more than the Sadducees did. But it must have a constant tendency to confirm their unbelief, to see that the advocates of Religion have themselves deserted, or grossly corrupted the Gospel. That the plain doctrine which the Apostles preached concerning Jesus, the Son of God;

God; and the inferences they drew from his sufferings and resurrection, have given place to the subtle niceties of the Schools, or to the mere moral Philosophy of the antient Gentiles: That the simplicity of manners and uniformity of subjection to the Apostles words; the fervent charity, and chearful self-denial of the first Christians, is supplanted by conformity to this world, by a veneration for RABBI'S; by an unlimited complaisance in religion, and allowed self-indulgence in life. It must have a tendency to make any sober man an Infidel, if he is required to believe that THIS IS CHRISTIANITY. But such corruptions of the truth are far from carrying with them any evidence against the Apostolic Testimony: they rather serve to confirm our confidence in it; because its words are hereby fulfilled.—“ There were false Prophets
 “ among the People, even as there shall be false
 “ Teachers among you, who privily shall bring in
 “ damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that
 “ bought them and bring upon themselves swift
 “ destruction. AND MANY SHALL FOLLOW THEIR
 “ PERNICIOUS WAYS, BY REASON OF WHOM THE
 “ WAY OF TRUTH SHALL BE EVIL SPOKEN OF.”
 —2nd Peter ii. 1, 2.

When we consider the GOOD CONFESSION which Jesus Christ witnessed before Pontius Pilate, we may see the source and evil of all these corruptions. John xviii. 36, 37. Jesus said, “ MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD: if my Kingdom
 “ were



“ were of this world then would my servants fight,
 “ that I should not be delivered to the Jews : But
 “ now is my Kingdom not from hence. Pilate
 “ therefore said unto him, art thou a King then?
 “ Jesus answered, thou sayest that I am a King.
 “ To this end was I born, and for this cause came I
 “ into the world, that I should bear witness unto
 “ the Truth. EVERY ONE THAT IS OF THE TRUTH
 “ HEARETH MY VOICE.

Jesus Christ confesses himself to be a King.
 And the account he gives of his Kingdom is correspond-
 ent to the prophecies which were published
 concerning it in antient times. It is this kingdom
 of which the Prophet Daniel said (ch. ii. 44) that
 it should be “ set up by the God of Heaven and
 “ should never be destroyed ; that it should not be
 “ left to other People, but should break in pieces
 “ and consume all the other kingdoms, and stand
 “ for ever. ” It is called by JOHN the BAPTIST
 and by JESUS himself the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

He shews by his *Confession* that it was not such
 a Kingdom as could any wise interfere with *Cæsar* ;
 nor could at all answer the earthly expectations of
 the *Jews*. There was no occasion for the Power of
 the Sword ; nor had it any dependance on the usual
 means by which the kingdoms of this world are
 supported.

A kingdom *that is not of this World*, must be dis-
 tinguished from one that is, by the things that are
Spiritual

Spiritual and Heavenly. If it is set up in this World, it must be in some respects connected with earthly things: because a part of his subjects are on Earth. But so far as it is a Kingdom of Christ it is *Spiritual*. He says of his Disciples (John xvii. 16) "they are not of the World even as I am not of the World:" And they are described in his reply to Pilate by this, as their distinguishing character, that "they are of the Truth and hear his voice." These are the same for whom he prayed 17th John; even, his Apostles, and all who "believe on him through their word."

This CONFESSION is illustrated by the history of the Christian Churches in the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. We there see how the Kingdom of Heaven was established. The promise of Christ being fulfilled and the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven; (Acts ii.) the Apostles of JESUS in diversity of languages, boldly testified the TRUTH CONCERNING HIM. "They who gladly received their word, were baptized; and the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." The numbers converted unto God at Jerusalem, were afterward dispersed: and thus became the instruments of spreading the Knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Apostles also were sent by the direction of Heaven, to convey the Gospel, not only to the Jews scattered abroad, but likewise to the *Gentiles*. And those who believed and made profession of the Faith were collected into Societies and were called
CHURCHES.

CHURCHES. These were composed only of such persons as appeared to *be of the Truth*, or to believe the *testimony concerning* JESUS CHRIST, THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE. They had officers ordained in them, who are addressed under the titles of BISHOPS OR ELDERS and DEACONS, (See Philchap. i. 1.) As the Apostles were faithful men, they taught the Disciples to do whatsoever Christ had commanded them. Accordingly it is said, “they continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.—Acts 2 ch. And, at the first, the influence of Divine Authority and Love was extraordinarily manifested in their obeying the *New Commandment* of their Lord: For, when the exigence of circumstances required it, “they who had possessions sold them, and distributed as every one had need.”

Thus the Kingdom of Christ was established with all possible evidence that it was not of this world. What laws were given, were of DIVINE ORIGIN and AUTHORITY: They were held superior to all other laws. *We ought*, say the servants of Jesus, *to obey God rather than man*. What power appeared, was the POWER OF GOD; working in a miraculous manner and with supernatural efficacy.—The DESIGN of this extraordinary interposition of HEAVEN was not to *restore the Kingdom to Israel*, or to bestow the honours or the riches of the world upon the followers of Christ—but *to deliver them from the present*

present evil world, and save them from perishing in the destruction which awaits it. So far were they from being allowed the hope of *reigning* in this life, that they were assured of being exposed to poverty, contempt, and every form of persecution. Neither their *principles* nor *practices* were conformable to this world. Neither were their *hopes* nor *fears* to be engaged by the concerns of it; But they were to wait for the return of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and expect to *reign with him in Glory*. They therefore confessed themselves *Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth*. And *looked for a city, as the Patriarchs before them had done, which had foundations; whose builder and maker was God*. The source of that extraordinary concord and fervent affection which appeared mutually among them, was not an union of civil interests; not the likeness of education and temper, but their common faith in the divine Saviour. They loved one another "for the truth's sake dwelling in them." For they had all found enough in the death and resurrection of JESUS to give them lively hope of mercy, and free access to God.

Such were the subjects of Jesus; such was his Kingdom, according to the divine records of the New Testament. If it was HIS design that any essential alteration should take place in it, we might expect to find some prophecy concerning this. The Apostles have, indeed, very clearly prophesied (1 Tim. iv. 1.) that, "in the latter times some would depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing

seducing spirits." That there would "come a falling away, and the man of sin be revealed."—2 Thess. ii. 3. The time is likewise spoken of in the book of Revelation, when, on the sounding of the seventh angel, it should be said (Rev. xi. 15 "the kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." But there is not the least prediction importing that the Kingdom of the LORD and his CHRIST should become "a kingdom of this world." Nor can it be any how proved that when the nations became *Christian*, they were in any other sense the kingdoms of Christ than they were before. But, on the contrary, it is a certain fact, that then Christianity was more abundantly corrupted. And, indeed, it could never have had such an extensive influence over the nations, if it had not been greatly changed, and exquisitely adapted to gratify the reigning lusts of the human heart.*

The sacred writings of the New Testament are the only standard by which to judge of Religion, since the ascension of JESUS CHRIST, and the decease of his Apostles. We have seen what his Religion was in its original establishment. Let us compare with it the established Religion of the times. It differs from Christianity in most, if not all, of those circumstances which distinguished the Kingdom of Christ from the kingdoms of this world.

Whatsoever

* See Note in the Appendix.

Whatsoever acknowledgments are made of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ in his Church, the *Sovereign of the nation* is the avowed head of the *Church of England*: and this is not in *name* only but in *power*. The laws of ecclesiastical governments are most of them purely human or, if originally divine, they are applied to things quite different to their first intention. The *Chief Officers* are such as have not even a name in the sacred records; and as the *civil magistrate* has an influence in the *Church*, so have some of *these* in the state. The Church and State are not only allied, but have an essential dependance one on the other. The subjects of this mixed kingdom are not distinguished from the world by being *of the truth*; but by owning the authority and submitting to the rights and ceremonies of the establishment. If there are those who consider themselves in some sense Pilgrims and Strangers on earth; all pretence to this character would be ridiculous, among the majority of them. And, on the other hand, many such characters as were carefully separated from the Christian Church by the Apostles, have not only a connection with, but even a tolerable share of reputation, in this nation of Christians: such as the covetous, the railer, the extortioner, &c. Or if their reputation suffers in some respects, they have yet a continuance in the Communion. The discipline by which the Churches of Christ were preserved from such unclean fellowship, could not possibly be maintained in the Church of England, but must totally change and subvert it.

Surely

Surely then that cannot be his Kingdom, wherein his own laws cannot be executed: And the subjects of which may live in opposition to them without controul. That must be a *kingdom of this world*, which is subject to an earthly head, dependant on the usual support of worldly government, and chiefly calculated to promote the civil interests of men.

There is, it must be owned, some distinction held between civil and ecclesiastical matters in the national establishment. But it is not such as will at all invalidate what is here urged to shew, that there is no *Essential Likeness* between the *Church of England* and the *Church of Christ*: unless it could be proved that the former is subject to the same head, is established on the same principles, is governed by the same laws, and supported by the same means as the Churches, formed by the Apostles, were. Or unless we have some other authentic revelation than what the NEW TESTAMENT contains by which to form a just notion of the CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

As the divines of the established Religion are supposed to be of one mind about the *canon* of Scripture and to give up every pretence to modern revelations; the only principle on which they can attempt a vindication in this matter is, one or the other of these; either *that the institutions of the Mosai-
Religion are a proper pattern, and a sufficient warrant for*

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the national establishment; or, that Christ left the affairs of his Kingdom to be directed by human prudence.

If the *former* is just, why is not the pattern to be uniformly followed?—But how then shall we understand the **CONFESSION** before Pontius Pilate? Could Christ with any truth declare that his Kingdom was not of this world, and this, in reply to the question, “Art thou the King of the Jews;” if he came into the World to set up a Kingdom among the *Gentiles* after the *Jewish* form?

If the *latter* is true, it must equally oppose that **CONFESSION**: for a kingdom left to the direction of human prudence, is a worldly kingdom still; whatever concern it may have with Religion. But there is not the least foundation in the Scriptures for such a thought. On the contrary, the Church of the living God “which he hath redeemed by “his blood,” is there represented as subject unto Him and Him *alone* in the matters of Religion: and should it be otherwise, it must involve the Church in the utmost confusion, or expose his authority to contempt. For if, by the dictates of human prudence, a general uniformity is enforced on the consciences of men, they must either submit *to man* in such a manner as they ought to submit *only to God*: or, by their *dissentions* break in upon all order.

What were the consequences of forcing such religious uniformity in former times, is well enough known.

known; and all parties feel the benefit of toleration. But these times of liberty have contributed not a little toward exposing the *Antichristian* causes and shewing the vanity of every pretence to Christianity in the *national Church*. The uniformity of CHRIST's Disciples in the faith and obedience of the Gospel, was very clear and remarkable: and it was pointed out by himself to be an evidence of his divine mission; when he prayed that "they all might be one—that the world might know that the Father had sent him." John xvii. Therefore when Paul reprov'd the divisions of the Church at Corinth, he alarmed them with this thought, that their disunion foreboded their separation from Christ when he appealed to them after this manner, IS CHRIST DIVIDED? And to the same purpose does he suggest, chap. ii, that while they came together into one place, having heresies and divisions among them, they could not properly eat the Lord's Supper; in which the unity of the *Body of Christ* was to be represented, by their *partaking of one Bread*.

If the Church of God is of one Faith, in which *party* of the establishment shall we find that Church? Among those who are agreed to worship Jesus Christ as God? or those who believe him to be only a *Creature* like themselves? Is it to be found among those, who professedly hope for salvation from the *divine Power and Grace*? or among

those, who maintain that men are saved by some worthiness in their *good works*? These are *differences* of some consequence; and there are others of a like nature, which plainly prove that they are not agreed even in the first principle of Christianity, respecting the salvation of the guilty: from this it appears that the established Church, has no relation to that Church of Jesus Christ, of which the Apostle spake, saying (Ephes. iv. 4.) “There is “one Body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called “in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one “faith, one baptism, one God and Father of “all, &c.”

There was never more than one national Church established of God, viz. the Church of ISRAEL, which had peculiar “ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary:” These were “figures for the time then present,” till Christ should come. That nation with all the institutions of its Religion, were long ago made to cease by the hand of God, according to the antient predictions. Every national establishment of Religion since then, does, in effect, “deny that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” So considerable is the opposition to real Christianity in the *Christian Kingdoms*.

Let us now observe the appearances of Religion among the many Sects, *dissenting* from the ESTABLISHMENT.

BLISHMENT. It must be acknowledged concerning some societies among the **DISSENTERS**, that they have rather more the *form of Godliness*, than any national Church can admit of. But it differs in general from that which was enforced by the doctrine of Jesus Christ; which consisted in keeping his commandments, and proceeded from a conviction of the Truth testified by the Apostles.

The congregations of **DISSENTERS** in this Town are numerous and of different persuasions. The most *reputable* among them are those who have the most *Charity*, or, (which is *now* the same thing) who are “the least tenacious of any religious principles.” These have been reproached as followers of **ARIUS** and **SOCINUS**, by the more *Orthodox*; who themselves follow **CALVIN**.

Without indulging an enquiry into the original reasons of *dissent*, it may suffice briefly to examine the claim of the *Dissenting Churches as they now stand*, to be the Churches of Jesus Christ. If they are *all* of them such the Religion of Jesus must be accounted a confused **MENLEY** of inconsistent doctrines and practices. For there is a very wide disagreement among them, concerning both. If there is *any one* of them a Church of Christ, it must appear by the unanimity of its members in believing the Gospel and obeying it. And we shall see them *walking in Love*, maintaining the order of *Worship* and discipline which the **WISDOM OF GOD** established in the

antient Churches. Whereas, upon the strictest enquiry, we shall hardly find this to be true of any society among the various denominations*. So far from it, they are for the most part agreed to set aside that order and discipline as being proper only in former times, and distant countries; or, as unsuitable to the present state of mankind.

The *public reading of the Scriptures* is in some of the *strictest congregations*, totally laid aside; to give the preacher a more enlarged opportunity of displaying his talents; and the hearers, the advantage of *better entertainment*.

They assemble on the Sabbath, with *one BISHOP* or *ELDER*, or at least one who leads the worship and the religious concerns of the people: thus, holding in contempt the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, who directed the Apostles to *ordain ELDERS* in every Church; Acts xiv. 23. which must imply that there should be two at least. Indeed, the Church of England, as it would seem, has studiously avoided any conformity to this; for, instead of *plurality of officers* in each society; it has often allowed a *plurality of Churches* to one Clergyman.

The duty of *mutual exhortation* so much insisted upon by the Apostles in their epistles to the first Churches—a duty enjoined upon the Brethren in general

* PRESBYTERIANS, INDEPENDANTS, BAPTISTS, QUAKERS, and METHODISTS.

general to be attended unto, not merely in private, but also when *publicly assembled* together for the purposes of divine worship (Heb. x. 25. 1 Cor. xiv.)—a duty eminently calculated to preserve them from being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. iii. 13.)—this institution is so far from engaging their attention that it seems scarcely known among the modern Churches that such a practice originally existed.

They cultivate among themselves such ideas, of the LORD'S SUPPER that it has gained quite another kind of *solemnity* than what at first belonged to it. If we attend to the most of their sacramental discourses, we shall find room to suspect that this divine ordinance is scarcely considered as a sacred token of FELLOWSHIP and UNION in the Gospel: But that the chief end of it is to animate the *private* devotion of the attendants. And, as *fits of affection* are apt to be weakened by very frequent returns, they have thought it best to repeat the solemn *ceremony* not oftener than *once a month*.

The known custom of the antient Christians, was to "come together on every first day of the week to break bread:" Acts xx. 7. They were taught to sanctify that day by celebrating the praises of HIM "who was delivered for their offences and raised again for their justification," Rom. iv. 25. which they did by observing the ordinances which were proper to the Sabbath. They continued stedfastly

fastly in the *Apostles doctrine*, the *fellowship*, the *breaking of bread*, and *Prayers*——*praising God*, &c. &c. Thus they had communion one with another as members of the Body of Christ; by reason of Unity in the *Faith*, in *Hope*, and in *Charity*.

Now, the modern Churches, finding many *little* disagreements among their members about the faith or doctrine of Christ, and being apprehensive that SOME UNION is necessary, have their want of Unity in the Christian Doctrine supplied chiefly in these two ways: viz. *By uniformity of Christian experiences*: And *by a peculiar growth of CHARITY*. The former is the principal *cement* of the *Orthodox Churches*.—The latter has flourished chiefly among the *polite* and liberal societies.

The mutual conformity of Christian experiences, and their use, for the purpose mentioned, may be briefly explained thus: the distinguishing marks of conversion to God, and of being Christians are supposed to consist in a certain secret operation of the SPIRIT OF GOD, distinct from any knowledge or conviction of the truth, entirely changing the *state* of a person; and bringing him to a devout and sober life: so that, whereas he has been hitherto wicked, in a state of enmity to God, and of condemnation; he is now become a friend to Religion, a gracious person, and is justified. Upon this principle, the conscience of a guilty man is relieved, not by believing, upon divine testimony, that there is forgiveness with God; for
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he takes it for granted that God will be merciful *to them that are properly qualified*: not by what is revealed concerning the obedience of Jesus unto death for the unjust; for this is suited to comfort other sinners equally with himself.——But his peace, and hope arise from the fancied amendment of his heart, and the change which gives him a superiority to the profane world, and some peculiar right to apply the promises of the Scriptures to himself.†

There are many different symptoms of this change; by which the subjects of it become acquainted with one another: and those who find these favourable *symptoms about them*, and are inclined to give a description of them, before the Church, in writing or by the mouth of the Minister, are admitted, if the description answers to the general *experience* of the society: There is also sometimes required a short confession of general articles of faith. But as the *Bond of Union* is a MUTUAL GOOD OPINION of *their state*, the former is by much the most important.

† They who cannot speak with reverence of this imaginary change, are commonly charged, with denying the *work of the Holy Spirit*; and the charge is held as good, even though they should openly maintain that no man understands THE TRUTH but by HIS TEACHING; or believes it but by HIS persuasion; or obeys it, but through HIS influence and power.

Herein

Herein, they have a source of consolation and happiness entirely unknown to the Primitive Christians, who finding *about themselves* no other character than that of *Sinners*, had no other source of hope and comfort but the *Righteousness* and *Mercy* of the DIVINE SAVIOUR. And on this their *Charity* was founded. Whereas it would but little affect the confidence of the most *experienced* Christians of *this sort* if the history of Jesus Christ could be proved to be only a *cunningly devised Fable*. For their comfort does not depend upon its being *true*: but upon the personal reasons they have to think that they are better than the *chief of Sinners*. ‡

The Apostles while they held forth a doctrine sufficient to make all men happy who believed it; maintained that the certain fruit of that Faith was Love to Christ, and the Brethren: Love, “not in word only but in deed and in truth;” manifested

‡ Take for instance the following specimen from a very recent production.

“Those who believe, not only with an *historical* faith, but with the FAITH THAT GOD GIVETH; not only in the letter, written on perishable materials, but also, in the Spirit, the everlasting Gospel of *immediate grace*, will not be in the least danger of *wavering*, even if the infidels could prove that the scriptures are *merely human narratives*, with the errors of *humanity*”!!!

Knox's Christian Philosophy, p. 553.

fested by actions of kindness, and proceeding from affection to what they believed. This was the great evidence of their having *passed from Death unto Life*. Now it must greatly alter the case, if the love of Christians is to proceed from other considerations than these. If they do not love one another *for the Truth's sake*, they do not love *as Brethren* in Jesus Christ. If they profess to love *those as Brethren*, who pervert that Truth, they, in effect, pervert it themselves. If they account those to be their Brethren who oppose the institutions of Jesus Christ, they become guilty of opposing them too; and no evidence remains of their being his Disciples.

Another considerable succedaneum for the want of *Christian Unity* is the *Catholic Charity*, which resembles the Charity commended by PAUL in *only* this one circumstance that it *groweth exceedingly* in most of the Churches. Among the stricter sort, it goes chiefly under the name of FORBEARANCE. We shall be much mistaken if we think that, by this soft and agreeable word, is chiefly meant the tenderness and compassion inculcated by the precepts of Christ, and his Apostles. It strictly means an agreement to differ quietly about the doctrines and commandments of the Gospel without interruption of visible fellowship. They distinguish carefully between FUNDAMENTALS, or things necessary to be believed and practiced; and CIRCUMSTANTIALS, or things that are indifferent. Now whatever foundation there may be for such a distinction

distinction in *human systems* of religion, it certainly looks very *ill-becoming* in the Churches of Christ to *question how far HE is to be believed and obeyed*. Our modern Churches have not indeed, quite *settled* this matter. But they have *nearly* agreed to hold all those things indifferent which would be inconvenient and disreputable, and to have communion together in observing somewhat like the customs of their forefathers.

Many of the plainest sayings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles are treated with high contempt, by the advocates of this forbearance: such as the rule of offences in the 18th Matthew; the prohibitions concerning treasuring up riches on Earth, in 5th Matt. and elsewhere; the imitation of Christ's humility and kindness, enjoined in the 13th John ver. 14, 15. These and various other things held SACRED among the Christians, are held even ridiculous among the modern professors of religion. The common people are persuaded to believe that all the antient institutions of Christianity were merely LOCAL and TEMPORARY, excepting such as the learned have agreed to be suitable to these times; or which have been customarily observed by their predecessors. But it would well become the DOCTORS IN DIVINITY to shew by what AUTHORITY any injunction of God, can be revoked, besides HIS OWN: or, how any man's conscience can be lawfully released by custom, example, or human authority,

thority, from observing such things as were instituted by the Apostles of Christ in his name.

This corrupt FORBEARANCE had no allowed place in the primitive Churches. The Apostle, in the epistle to the EPHESIANS, chap. iv. required of them to adorn their "vocation with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in LOVE." But had they dispensed with the laws of Christ for convenience and ease, it had been forbearing one another IN HATRED. For those laws were expressions of his love; the most fervent love that was ever shewn amongst men, directed by infallible wisdom. Whosoever therefore would obliterate them, or any how attempt to change them, must either suppose himself *wiser* than Jesus Christ, or a greater friend to mankind. He must be moved either by an enormous SELF-CONCEIT, or by the spirit of MALEVOLENCE.

Although the modern CHARITY wears very much the appearance of humility, and good-will to men, yet it stands in direct opposition to that love of THE TRUTH by which the primitive Christians were distinguished: insomuch, that if any such Churches should now appear, as those to whom the sacred Epistles were directed, they must be content to bear reproach as they formerly did, and be hated for their *bigotry* and *superstition*.

The more *thinking* part of religious men, observing what great mischiefs have arisen from contentions about Truth, and being, perhaps, a little *sceptically* inclined, have found it most desirable *to let Truth alone*; and to concern themselves chiefly about living *profitably* in civil society. To be of *some religion* is but decent. And the interests of human life require that it be popular and compliant. If men have different notions of *Jesus Christ*, his Divinity, his Sacrifice, his Kingdom, and the Customs of his Religion, even, from what the Apostles seemed to have, CHARITY demands that we think well of their religious characters, notwithstanding this. These are dubious and difficult points about which great and good men have differed.— It is *unbecoming the modesty of wise men* to be confident on any side; and *contending earnestly* for opinions injures the peace of the CHRISTIAN CHURCH. Thus *kind and humble* is modern CHARITY. But it looks with an evil eye on that *rude sort* of kindness with which the followers of *Jesus* propagated his Gospel, presenting to men the most melancholy view of their guilt, and leaving them no hope but through righteousness *perfect and divine*. It shudders to hear them enforcing his words “He that believeth and is baptized *shall* be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned.” But it is comforted by thinking that there were many things peculiar to the first ages, and, perhaps, this may be one of them. To say the least, the corrupters of Christianity have great reason to wish so.

This

This prevailing CHARITY stands eminently distinguished from that which the Scriptures inculcate, in this respect ; the latter increased in proportion to the unanimity of Christians in loving the doctrine of Jesus Christ ; the former encreases in proportion to its diffidence and uncertainty about that doctrine ; instead of *rejoicing in*, or with *the Truth*, it rejoiceth in contemplating the ADMIRABLE PIETY that may be produced from so many different, yea, opposite principles.

There has been much reproach cast on the QUAKERS, for their tenacious adherence to their opinions and customs, even by those who are in the main very much agreed with them. Of what importance is it how they dress ? they affect plainness and a sort of uniformity ; probably from the same principle which has clothed the Clergy in *black*.—Affectation, and pride in such distinctions, are contemptible in any man ; and much more, if he attempts to vindicate them by the word of God. The *experienced* persons among the *Puritan* Dissenters and the Methodists, are of one mind with the QUAKERS in what they all esteem the ESSENTIALS of religion. What imaginable difference is there between *grace in the heart* which the former admire ; and *the Spirit, the light within*, which is the great *Arcanum* of the latter ? They equally mean, the secret operation of invisible power, making them more acceptable to God ; and supplying, more or less, the want of *perfect righteousness*. They agree to

call the Scriptures of Truth, a *dead letter*. The external observances of the primitive Christians are rejected by them both as *superstitious* and *carnal*, under the pretence of cultivating the *private religion of the heart*; as though that religion were the better for being secret; or, like some combustible powder, acquired an additional strength by being *close pent up*.

It is very true that the power of Godliness has often suffered in a zealous contention about rites and ceremonies, but that contention has been chiefly about forms of *human device*. The Christians of old time were taught not to dispute about the institutions of their Lord, but to observe them thankfully; and hereby they expressed their affection to him and to each other. If that *affection* is granted to be more important than the *tokens* of it, it would be unjust to infer that the latter have no obligation, which would imply that Christ and the Apostles meant nothing by their precepts.

The METHODISTS have not indeed gone so far as their *spiritual Brethren* (the Quakers) have done in rejecting all external ceremonies: but they are taught to believe that all concern about the ancient order and customs of the Christians is mere *party-spirit*, and injurious to the devout exercises of the heart. Thus the modern CHARITY vaunts itself in answering better purposes than could be accomplished by keeping the words of Christ. It produces

produces a more extensive and generous communion; and animates the devotion of men without perplexing them by uncertain doctrines or rigorous self-denial. But, however excellent in its effects, it has its origin, not in the faith of Jesus Christ, or in Love to God, but it is the *first born Child of Scepticism and Infidelity*. For although it supposes some Revelation from God, and some honor due to Jesus Christ; it claims a right to dispense with both; to choose what, in his doctrine and religion is *fit to be believed, and observed*; and thus obscures the whole in a *mist of uncertainty*. As *this Charity* therefore, has become essential to the various Churches of Dissenters, and the fruits of it abound in them as they do in all the world; we shall be vindicated in saying, that Christianity is not visibly exemplified in these societies, any more than it is in the national establishment.

Upon the whole, the religion of Jesus is not to be understood but by the sacred writings of the Evangelists and Apostles: it is practicable in every age, without a continuance of miracles; for it consists in believing what he has said, and doing what he has required. It is, however, understood and practised only through the power of the Holy Ghost on the hearts of men. They are Christians, who are thus taught of God to BELIEVE and OBEY. Those are Christian Churches which are formed by a persuasion of the truth, and regulated by the

precepts and approved examples contained in the New Testament.

It would argue great self-conceit should any society of people, in the present day, imagine itself equal to the first Christians in fervency of love, in purity of worship, and in strictness of obedience. But it implies no such vanity in being **STUDIOUS OF FOLLOWING THEM.**

Whosoever is heartily engaged in so doing, will find himself obliged by the word of God, to a total separation from every *religious* connection with the *Christian World*. And he will have no reason to be ashamed of **THE CAUSE**, however discouraging its temporal prospects, or however great its reproach, since it is a **CAUSE** which bears the sincerest **BENEVOLENCE TOWARD MEN**, and will be supported by every **CONSOLATION OF GOD.**

APPENDIX.

[The following note refers to page 13th of the foregoing remarks, but was considered as too long for insertion in that place.]

DR. NEWTON in his Dissertation on the Prophecies (Vol. 3d, Page 200, Octavo Ed. 1786) commenting on Rev. xii. 5. *She brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations*, observes that “it was predicted that Christ should rule over the nations Ps. ii. 9.” and he adds, “but Christ who is himself invisible in the Heavens, ruleth visibly in Christian Magistrates, Princes and Emperors.” By the man child, he supposes Constantine “was particularly intended”—that he “*was caught up unto the throne of God*; he was not only secured by the divine protection, but was advanced to the imperial throne, called *the throne of God*, for (Rom. xiii. 1.) *there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God.*”

In the last interview which Jesus Christ had with his Disciples, he said unto them, *All power is given*

given unto me in Heaven and in Earth: Go ye therefore and teach all nations, &c. Matt. xxviii. 18—20. This power became visible in the propagation of his Gospel: And the grand object and design of it, he expresses in this manner. (John xvii. 2.) *Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give ETERNAL LIFE to as many as thou hast given him.* But we no where read in the New Testament of his “ruling visibly in Christian Magistrates, Princes and Emperors.” The great object of these powers is the TEMPORAL life of men. They are ordained of God for the peace of society: *For the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.* And when Paul declares *that the powers which be, are ordained of God,* he speaks of the HEATHEN Magistrates &c. then existing. It is equally applicable indeed to those called CHRISTIAN MAGISTRATES. But did not Christ *rule visibly* in the former as much as he does in the latter? Or are we to understand that Constantine and all his successors, that the Popes of Rome, the Emperors of Germany, the Kings of France and Spain, &c. were all VISIBLE REPRESENTATIVES of JESUS CHRIST, in their respective governments.

The LEARNED INTERPRETER of the prophecies, has, elsewhere in the same volume, p. 229, told us, that the *Image* and Representative of the Beast (mentioned in Rev. xii.) is the POPE, and *the two horned beast is the Roman Church,* p. 224. Now by the same arguments which prove that the Pope and

and the Church subject to him, are Antichristian, we shall be obliged to conclude that all national Churches are so likewise: for *those* are proved to be such, by their corrupting the Gospel of Jesus Christ, changing his laws and establishing in his name a worldly Religion. And *these* have done likewise. If this respectable writer had not been misled by the confused idea of popular and national Christianity, but had obtained his ideas of Christ's Kingdom from HIS CONFESSION before Pilate and the Apostolic explanation of it, we might have expected a grand illustration of these Prophecies, from so masterly a pen, accustomed to perspecuity and elegance, and directed by such extensive knowledge.

FINIS.

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